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JPRS L/9109

27 May 1980

Near East/North Africa Report

(FOUO 19/80)



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NEAR EAST/NORTH AFRICA REPORT

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ALGERIA

DETAILS OF 7-YEAR ELECTRIFICATION PLAN GIVEN

Paris MARCHES TROPICAUX ET MEDITERRANEENS in French 27 Mar 80 pp 678-79

[Article: "A 7-Year Electrification Program To Cover the Whole Country"]

[Text] Algeria, whose rate of electrification rose in 1978 to 60 percent, expects to supply the entire country with electricity over the next 7 years. To make electricity available to the 12,000 small villages scattered across an area four times larger than that of France and inhabited by 9 million people, in other words half of Algeria's population, the state has just released the equivalent of 6 billion francs to finance a 7-year program.

SONELGAZ (National Electricity and Gas Company) since its establishment in August 1969, has had a monopoly on production, transportation and distribution as well as on the transportation of natural gas through secondary pipelines, which has been entrusted by the government to put into effect this electrification program, which basically covers the rural or desert areas of the Algerian south.

According to the most recent Algerian statistics on electrification, the provinces best supplied with electricity are Alger, Oran and Annaba, with electrification rates exceeding 95 percent. The wilayas of Biskra, Tiaret or Tizi-Ouzou are close to the national average, with rates varying between 50 and 60 percent, while those of M'Sila, Jijel or Tebessa record a rate of only 30 percent. Algeria, nevertheless, with a national electrification rate of 60 percent, is in the forefront among the best supplied countries of Africa and the Third World.

For Algeria, making electricity available to all its citizens, wherever they may live, is "an act of social justice and answers the right of every Algerian to the fulfillment of basic social needs," under the same category as the right to work, housing and education, etc.

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The Major Stages of Progress

Following its independence, Algeria was restricted in the field of electrification to maintaining and repairing the existing installations. The first steps were undertaken starting in 1965 until 1970 to electrify 73 areas (hamlets and villages) totaling a population of 1.1 million persons, along with making, province by province, a complete inventory of the country's needs. Because of the limited loans allocated to this project, the lack of qualified personnel and the deficiency of resources to carry out the project, only those operations considered priority were undertaken. Nevertheless, a substantial and significant engineering job was undertaken for 2 years to establish a more extensive electrification project that was completed in the 1970-73 4-year period.

It was, in fact, starting from the first 4-year plan (1970-73) that rural electrification in Algeria experienced a leap forward: 480 sites anticipated by this plan and 100 others that appeared in the special programs launched at that time to benefit several poor regions were put into operation, supplying 97,000 homes with electricity. The loans allocated to this first electrification project, which required the establishment of a specialized company subordinate to SONEGGAZ, reached 213 million dinars.

During the second 4-year period (1974-77), 858 other sites, nearly 220 of which established in Saharan regions, were put into effect for 560 million dinars, bringing the national electrification rate (relation between the number of consumers and the total number of homes) to 57 percent at the end of 1977.

The 7-year plan that was adjusted to complete the electrification of the rest of the country, and for which a loan of 5.5 billion dinars was made, at an initial stage dealt with restoring regional balance in electrification to the extent that, for example, the number of sites to receive electrification is clearly greater in the east than in the west and in the south than in the north. Moreover, one anticipates that electrification of the areas chosen, apart from their more or less priority status, will be effected in clusters, including, if possible, the large, average and even remote towns, which will be supplied simultaneously. However, at the start this plan leaves out small sites that are too remote, which would make the electrification project depend on housing policies and adjusting it to each region, according to the area's specific features and limitations.

Significant Resources Put to Work

To put its electrification program to work, Algeria from now on has available all the necessary parts besides loans, Algeria has an organization, SONEGGAZ, that is quite effective and experienced, provided with capable personnel and specialized companies. In the building area alone, SONEGGAZ calculates creating during the next 2 years 4,500 new jobs, of which nearly 800 will be management and building supervisors. Outside of technical resources as well

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as those of equipment, personnel and finance, already substantial, that SONEGAS has available for this project; Algeria has the backing, also substantial, if not more so, of the national company entrusted with producing electrical and electronic equipment, SONELEC, not to mention the considerable contribution of an efficient and energetic private sector through subcontracting.

Moreover, local manufacturing is from now on prepared to provide the necessary equipment. SN Metal produces the metallic posts in its factories and intends to establish a series of small regional factories to manufacture concrete posts. SONELEC is ready to fulfill the demand for transformers, manufactured in a factory in Azazga, in Grande-Kabylie, and for cables in its cableworks, a considerable portion of which is exported. Lastly, the meters are to be made by a factory which is in the process of being built in El-Eulma, in eastern Algeria.

In the meantime, such an electrification plan--which involves the electrification of 12,000 sites, the joining of 1.2 million homes representing 9 million inhabitants and the building of 58,000 km of average and low tension and 11,700 conversion stations, the increased development of the country, especially in the various manufacturing sectors--calls for building new electric power stations, some of which will be established in the country's north and south.

Forecasts point out that the total power installed, which was about 1,276 megawatts in 1976, should triple in 1985 to reach 3,388 megawatts. Already the construction of new industrial plants during the last 5 years has required building about 40 high tension stations, while the interlinked high tension network increased from 4,150 km in 1975 to 8,050 km this year.

To measure the progress made it is worthwhile to remember that power installed barely rose to 627 megawatts in 1965, after a 30 percent drop recorded in the first 3 years of independence, with 338 megawatts of the above figure thermal in origin and the remainder hydraulic. Power had been brought to nearly 750 megawatts in 1970, the start of the first 4-year plan (1970-73), followed by the launching of the second 4-year plan (1974-77). The increased development that resulted in all areas of the economy made it possible to triple the capability of the means of production from 1970 to 1979; their production capability increased, in fact, from 627 megawatts in 1969 to 1,882 megawatts due to the installation of steam heat power stations in Annaba, Skikda and Oran, gas turbine power stations in Alger, Hassi-Messaoud, Hassi-R'Mel, Ghardaia, Ain-El-Baya, Boufarik, Bab-Ezzouar, Touggourt and Tiaret, and diesel power stations in El-Oued, Illizi, Djanet, Beni-Ounif, Tindouf, Taghit, Beni-Abbes and Kerzaz, as well as new gas turbines in the process of construction at Marsat-El-Hadj, Touggourt and M'Sila. The electrical transmission network was multiplied 180 percent from 1969 to 1979; the high tension network showed an increase of 6 percent during the first 4-year plan and 5.6 percent during the second 4-year period.

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Increase in Production and Sales

Production of electricity grew at a more sustained rate. It increased from 1,462 GWh (acceleration of gravity watt hours) in 1969 to 5,566 GWh in 1979, with a growth rate of 12.5 percent during the first plan and 15 percent during the second plan, a growth fundamentally secured by the thermal power stations (80 percent of total production).

Energy sales (in GWh) nearly tripled during the last decade--from 1,500 GWh in 1970, sales reached a volume of 3,600 GWh in 1977 and exceeded 4,200 GWh in 1979.

The growth of production and consumption of natural gas is even more spectacular. The advance deductions of natural gas by SONELGAZ according to SONATRACH (Algerian National Hydrocarbon Company), which reached 5,280 million thermal units in 1969, had doubled in 1974, achieved 18,900 million thermal units in 1977 and should reach 40 million thermal units in 1980.

Natural gas sales by the single SONELGAZ network, which were 2.84 billion thermal units in 1970, increased to 8.61 billion thermal units in 1977 and exceeded 15 billion thermal units in 1979.

This growth in energy production was accomplished because of investments whose ascending curve is equally meaningful--scarcely 290 million dinars in 1970, 1.04 billion dinars in 1977 and more than 2.5 billion dinars in 1979. The SONELGAZ personnel, which was about 5,400 managers, building supervisors and specialized or skilled laborers in 1970, grew to 12,000 in 1977 and 16,900 in 1979.

10-Year Forecasts

The forecasts for this decade show the extent of the effort that Algeria intends to undertake in seeking its industrialization. The total established capability for electricity must grow, in fact, according to early figures, from 2,000 megawatts in 1980 to 4,600 megawatts in 1985 and to 7,500 megawatts in 1990. Energy production will be brought from 6,200 GWh in 1980 to 13,830 GWh in 1985 and to 24,000 GWh in 1990. Energy sales will increase from 5,350 GWh in 1980 to 12,200 GWh 5 years later and to 21,300 GWh at the end of this decade, which for all electricity areas will show an average yearly growth of 14.5 percent.

Growth rates are greater in the gas field: the advance deductions of natural gas according to SONATRACH will triple from 1980 to 1985 (increasing from 39.6 billion thermal units in 1980 to 103.2 billion thermal units in 1985) and will reach a volume of 210 billion thermal units in 1990. Natural gas sales will reach a volume of 66.8 billion thermal units in 1985, against 21.5 billion thermal units in 1980, and will rise to 144 billion thermal units in 1990, which allows us to anticipate an average yearly increase of 19 percent.

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Investments should reach 8 billion dinars, against 3.48 billion, to attain 20 billion dinars at the end of this decade, which is an average yearly increase of 19 percent. SONEGAS personnel will grow from 18,000 persons in 1980 to 32,400 in 1985 and to nearly 40,000 managers and laborers in 1990, which is an increase of 8 percent.

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IRAN

ASHRAF SEEN PLANNING SHAH'S RESTORATION FROM ISRAEL

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French No 1008, 30 Apr 80 p 24

[Text] The former shah of Iran is now in Egypt, ostensibly pampered by President Sadat and his wife. Might he have given up all hope of living "until the overthrow of those who overthrew him?" Certainly not, if one is to believe some confidential talk emanating from Cairo.

At any rate, his twin sister, the notorious Ashraf--the real man in the family--is not only hoping and praying. Both before and after the fall of the monarchy, she often accused her brother of passivity and vehemently reproached Farah Diba with her bad influence on her husband. Supported by Nixon and Kissinger, assisted by the veterans of the U.S. and Iranian secret services and able to dispose of tens of millions of dollars, Ashraf is undertaking the reconquest of power in Tehran. At the very least, she wants to take revenge for last year's humiliation.

Which is her base of operations? Not Cairo (she believes that Arabs are not trustworthy). Not the U.S.: the distance is too great. But Israel, closer to Tehran. Ashraf has been in this country for a few weeks. The Israeli government and its secret services have made available to her vast facilities to organize and train some hundreds of Iranians as commandos. Moreover, on special authorization from Prime Minister Menachem Begin, the MOSSAD (the Israeli intelligence service) has taken charge of the operations.

Ashraf's commandos hope to initiate activities as early as mid-May, just at the time when President Carter will consider himself compelled to proceed from economic and financial sanctions to military action against the Iranian Islamic Republic.

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QATAR

PAPER COMMENTS ON GISCARD D'ESTAING'S VISIT TO GULF

Paris AL-WATAN AL-ARABI in Arabic 18-24 Apr 80 pp 46-48

[Text] Doha, from the correspondent of AL-WATAN AL-ARABI.

Qatar produces about half a million barrels of petroleum daily from its inland and offshore wells. It exports about 96 percent of its production, which began inland in 1949 and offshore in 1964.

Since petroleum is an exhaustible substance, Qatar intends to exploit its natural gas wells and the gases which accompany [the production of] petroleum, as well as [to use] the illumination of these gases in an ambitious industrialization program.

AL-WATAN AL-ARABI asked Minister of Finance and Petroleum Shaykh 'Abd-al-'Aziz ibn Khalifah Al Thani about his government's opinion regarding all of the basic issues which pertain to Arab petroleum with regard to production, prices, and how these issues reflect on Arab economic relations with the consumer countries.

With regard to these relations, Shaykh 'Abd-al-'Aziz criticized the position of the world petroleum companies, the "seven sisters", which bear the responsibility for raising petroleum prices and realizing huge profits and the expense of the producer and the consumer.

Nor did he neglect to praise the positive position of France with regard to the Arabs, commending French President Giscard d'Estaing's role in it and censuring the Western information media in general for their attempt to distort his recent trip to the Gulf.

I said to the Qatari minister:

Q. What are the premises and the results of the policy which is being followed in Qatar to develop the petrochemical industries?

A. With regard to exploitations and industries, especially those which have been and are being carried on in the light of the policy which has been laid down, we have commenced to carry out several projects, foremost among which at the present time is the iron and steel production project.

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There is also a chemical fertilizers project, which has begun to recover its capital, and there are the petrochemical industries complexes, one of which has been completed recently.

The fundamental purpose of creating and establishing these industries is to create an alternative national production which will enable us to conserve our resources, considering that the petroleum will not last forever.

Here, in the field of the execution of the plan of industrialization, we are confronted by the [problems of] the basic conversion by numerous steps, determining the need for production and the capability of comprehension, and providing through the creation of training institutes, the human skills for operation and production.

These are steps which will necessarily encounter some difficulties in their preparatory stages, and the large industrial countries have passed through comparable conditions. Nevertheless, all difficulties must be overcome to insure continued development and to increase and diversify the national product.

When we had finished preparing and carrying out the majority of the items of the plan of heavy industrialization, we turned our attention toward preparing the plan of developing the light industries, and these are now being studied and investigated in their basic items.

Q. With regard to talk concerning the iron and steel mill, it is being subjected to a campaign of distrust concerning the extent of its efficiency and profitability for Qatar and the Gulf area. What are the difficulties of operating it, and how are you solving the problem of providing the experts and technical manpower that it needs?

A. We are not suffering from a lack of experienced men and operating technicians. I consider these statements mere exaggerations, and they do not apply to the rest of the heavy industries either.

In answer to the question concerning distrust in the iron and steel industry itself, there is no cause for uncertainty or stirring up the dust about it. It supplies our domestic requirements and likewise answers the requirements of our sister nations, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and others. In brief, it is a profitable and necessary project, and is far from being a loss.

Q. Is there a trend toward reducing the rate of production of petroleum in Qatar, and are there probabilities of the discovery of new petroleum fields which will augment the quantity of the reserve?

A. Our petroleum production policy is based on the present annual rate of production. That applies to the present time and the existing conditions, but, if unforeseen events should occur, they would necessitate a review of this position, for there will be a discussion of every incident.

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As for new discoveries, there are many expectations of them, and these expectations are encouraging. However, they still need to be followed up.

Q. Can a stronger coordination among the OPEC countries for the petroleum production program be set up in accordance with the real needs of the world market and the benefit of the petroleum-producing countries?

A. I believe that the time has come for me to speak on the production program, for there must be cooperation and coordination for the guidance and organization of petroleum production.

Since, as we know, petroleum is a substance which may give out at any time in its wells and underground reservoirs, we must prepare a programmed petroleum policy which will be in harmony with our domestic requirements and the developments of that policy and which will guarantee the requirements of the world market, with a concern for not giving the industrial nations a chance to persist in the policy of storing petroleum in their reservoirs far beyond their requirements.

If storage continues and escalates, it will mean depriving the petroleum-producing countries of their natural right to take advantage of the escalation of prices, which, as we know, accompanies the escalation of the prices of various goods year after year.

In other words, storing petroleum means taking advantage of the opportunity to buy it at nominal prices and realize huge gains later on for those who store it at the expense of the producing countries.

We are now endeavoring to create a basis for the production program, and, if we are successful, we shall have realized that advantage for ourselves and for all of the OPEC petroleum-producing countries.

Q. Are there studies which determine how long the petroleum will hold out?

A. Indeed there are estimates, some of which are based on scientific facts, and, when one has acquainted oneself with all of these studies, one can say that the petroleum will last for 30 years at the longest.

Q. Is there concentration on projects of exploiting natural gas and the gas which accompanies petroleum in Qatar?

A. The fact is that the Dukhan field will yield its production for the first and second stages in the middle of this year, and this will give us an opportunity to enter into the Arab market as gas exporters instead of being more dependent on foreign markets than we ought to be.

Studies are now in progress to exploit the largest gas fields in the north of the country on the basis of the need to exploit all of our natural resources so that our dependence will not remain centered on petroleum alone to develop the national income.

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If we compare gas production to that of petroleum, the gas of the north is considered equal to about 300,000 barrels per day. So far as costs are concerned, I have no definite studies on them yet.

I am speaking of the exploitation of gas in the light of a general policy which is being prepared and carried out. The rest of the details will then branch out from this policy, and the issue of costs will, of course, be among them. We have obtained preliminary estimates of the costs of the project of exploiting the Dukhan gas field.

Q. Have you reached a solution to the problem of production in the offshore field which you own jointly with the emirate of Abu Dhabi and a Japanese company?

A. We have reached a definite result, which I believe will be applied. However, the quantity which will be produced from the fields to which you refer is a modest one. Furthermore, there is a field of [subterranean] water concerning which we have not reached an agreement with the Japanese because the costs are too high and we do not need it yet.

Nevertheless, there is a general agreement which will enable us to make the fields to which I refer productive, and the importance of this field, from a symbolic point of view, is that it is a joint project between us and the UAE.

Q. Is it possible to learn the details of this agreement?

A. The most important detail of it is that it employs the principle of sharing the exploitation and the revenue between ourselves and the UAE.

Q. Then, is the issue of stopping production there considered to be at an end?

A. Up to this time, the issue of stopping production has been applicable to the deposit of subterranean water only, because, as I have said, it costs too much and we do not need it. It is now being studied, but we haven't reached a final decision on it.

Q. Has the estimate of the size of Qatar's natural gas reserve been modified since the recent investigations which were carried out jointly with the Shell company in northwest area recently?

A. The Shell company is continuing the preparation of studies on this subject. However, we have not adopted any final decision concerning the choice of the company which is to undertake the accomplishment of this task, for there are procedures and auctions which must precede every agreement that is made with the companies and there are technical specifications which must be set forth in the introduction to the details which precede the agreement.

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What the Shell company is doing so far is preparing the studies. These studies have produced positive results, and have confirmed the presence of a gas deposit in Qatar which is large enough to provide a steady output for about 400 years.

Q. Do you believe that it is best to link gas prices with those of petroleum on the world market?

A. The OPEC is studying this subject and is trying to prepare an outline of a basis for determining the prices of gas. I believe that the time has come for OPEC to adopt clear-cut measures in this matter, for gas is going to become the second basic substance, directly following petroleum in importance in the production of energy. It will be necessary to create a price base for gas so that it will not fall prey to certain companies or be sacrificed to them, as was the case with petroleum in the past.

It is not permissible for the situation to continue as it is now with regard to the difference in gas prices on the world market. You find it at high prices in one place and at low prices in another place at the same time. It is an anomalous situation, in which the producing countries pay its price without any justification.

Q. What is the anticipated role for gas with respect to industry in Qatar?

A. I believe that gas will have a principal role in domestic and light industries. Without gas, we should not be able to create firm and viable industries, for it is a basic substance in the field of building industries.

We are now studying an integral plan which will be carried out during the course of 5 to 10 years, the basis of it being to find out the best way to go about exploiting the gas. This plan has not been carried out yet, because, as I said, we have not yet reached the stage of concentrated gas production.

Q. What is your position with regard to opening commerce with the "basket of currencies" to determine the prices of petroleum?

A. There has been a flood of questions concerning the issue of the "basket of currencies", and our answer is that we believe that the dollar is still the best currency that we can deal in and with which to settle accounts. The "basket of currencies" exists by virtue of the Geneva agreement, but we must observe that the dollar gives a higher interest rate than any other currency.

There are some analysts who look at the subject from one point of view: they base their decisions on their consideration of the dollar as a currency which is liable to continuing devaluation. These analysts forget the other side, that the interest rate obtained from dealing in the dollar is higher than that which is to be had from dealing in the rest of the currencies.

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In other words, if I should sell part of the petroleum for sterling and another part for dollars, I should find out promptly that the interest rate from dealing with the dollar was greater than that from dealing in sterling. Even though there is a substitute for the dollar, there is no problem. The possibility of relying on the "basket of currencies" exists, and I could rely on it at any time; nevertheless, I declare my conviction that the dollar is still the best currency that we can deal in to settle the petroleum accounts.

Q. Are those who propose the principle of the "basket of currencies" torn between the principle of economic liberation from the sphere of the dollar on one hand and pressure on the U.S. administration to change its position regarding the Palestine issue on the other hand?

A. I am pleased to assure you that reliance on dealing in the dollar is not based on any political considerations. We apply the best and most advantageous economic methods in this field, and political considerations are not applied to this subject.

There are many exploitations which are done through other currencies in addition to the dollar; these include the German mark, the Italian lira, the Swiss franc, French franc, and others. If there were political considerations, why should the idea not be applied to these exploitations, which are present in the area?

Q. Perhaps the purpose of depending on the "basket of currencies" is to limit the dealing in the dollar so as to apply pressure on the U.S. administration.

A. If we were sure that stopping dealing in the dollar on the part of the OPEC area and the Arab nations would have an effective influence on the political position of the U.S. administration and would accomplish what we want, then we should never hesitate for an instant to drop the dollar for other currencies.

That is to say, if [getting rid of] the dollar should help toward bringing about a just solution to the Arab Palestine issue--and I believe that that is the object of the question--then we should never hesitate to do so, for the Arab cause is the basic issue for which we live, to which we devote all of our powers, and for which we are ready to sacrifice the last drop of our blood.

Nor do I suppose that the dollar will be an obstacle in the way of our progress in this direction, because the U.S. administration will be faced with the difficult decision if it is proved that the restoration of the Palestinian right is bound up with the U.S. dollar.

Q. How much of the aid which you offer to the Arab countries out of the revenues from petroleum in Qatar is used?

A. I have no estimate of the rate of aid. However, Qatar employs large sums in the field of aid and various exploitations which are being carried out in the Arab countries and in other countries which are marching on the road to development and building.

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Of course, the Islamic countries are included in these.

Q. What are the most important industrial projects which you are planning to carry out with the petroleum revenues which are being realized and the gas revenues which are anticipated?

A. The most important project on which our attention is centered at the present time is that of exploiting the gas in the north field. This is one of the largest projects of this nature.

Q. What is the role which, in your opinion, petroleum ought to play now in facing the problems of the Arab world?

A. I do not believe that the time has come for us to brandish the weapon of petroleum as a solution to our problems, either here in the Gulf or in the whole Arab world.

This leads me to speak of the need to convert the Gulf area into an area devoid of international struggles, an area which will not lie under the influence of either of the world currents, the U.S. or the Russian.

When we do need petroleum for a weapon, it should be used to support our rights and our existence, and Qatar will be in the vanguard of those who apply whatever measures ought to be applied to attain the desired goals.

Q. It is observed that there are disputes among the OPEC countries, especially over whatever pertains to the standardization of petroleum prices.

A. There are no deep-rooted disputes within the organization. The phenomenon of price differences in recent times has caused the people to look speculatively at the foundation of OPEC with regard to the extent of the firmness of the condition among its member nations. This is a natural speculation, coming after the prices were standardized in the past and later turned into a collection of different prices.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is a dispute in the ranks of the organization which caused new conditions to arise with regard to prices so that the price became diversified instead of single. What brought about this multiplicity of prices was the petroleum companies known as the "seven sisters", which work to fragment the prices and trading in petroleum so as to get exorbitant prices before the petroleum goes from the producer to the consumer.

President Carter of the U.S. confirmed this fact recently when he said that these companies realized profits which are estimated in billions of dollars, and so the upswing which took place in price levels was caused directly by the methods which the petroleum companies are using.

As an example of what I am saying, you will find that when a barrel of petroleum is sold at 30 dollars in Qatar, it reaches the markets of Rotterdam, New York, or London to be sold at 40 or 45 dollars.

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The question, then, is, "Who is buying at 30 and selling at 45? Is it OPEC, or is it the petroleum companies?"

The answer is that it is the petroleum companies which are engaging in this operation. Therefore, the whole blame should be directed at these companies, the "seven sisters", for they are responsible for the troubles that the world is enduring, as well as for inflation, the high cost of living, and the rise of prices, especially in Europe and the Arab world.

Q. Did the discussions which took place with French President Giscard d'Estaing during his visit to Qatar result in the signing of certain agreements, especially in the petroleum sector, or in coordination for the development of economic cooperation between the two countries?

A. I regret to say that the Western information media have taken recourse to various attempts to distort the aims and results of the French president's trip to the Gulf. The fact is that his visit was productive and profitable, and we are highly pleased with his position regarding the Arab cause. I commend President d'Estaing.

The misleading propaganda has tried to connect the trip with distorted conversations concerning nonexistent agreements, although I ask myself at this point, "Why do not positive and fruitful joint agreements between ourselves and France take place?"

If we did not give petroleum to France, to whom should we give it then? Who stands to gain from stopping the course of cooperation between ourselves and this friendly country? Is it profitable for us to throw obstacles in the way of continued cooperation with France and to give our petroleum to the enemies of our Arab causes and of our interests and our existence?

I regret that the French press distorts the truth about the trip of President Giscard d'Estaing. It would have been more fitting for it to throw light on the real results of that trip, which brought dignity and honor to France's position regarding the Arab cause.

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TUNISIA

M'ZALI SEEN AS POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR TO PRESIDENT

Paris JEUNE AFRIQUE in French 12 March 80 pp 28-29

[Article by Tunis correspondent Souhayr Belhassen]

[Text] It was not a decree but a simple communique dated 1 March which confers the nomination of Mohamed M'Zali, minister of national education, to the functions of "coordinator," without any power of signature. Therefore, for the moment, it is strictly a technical arrangement. Humanitarian considerations and a necessary respite for pondering explain why Bourguiba would not nominate a new prime minister on the spot; that is, according to the constitution, his successor designate. By this gesture, all the same, the head of state puts the education minister "in a state of observation," to quote one of his close collaborators.

It is a daring gesture, however, which changes "the implicit hierarchy of the government," as a communist teacher put it. In the mind of most of the people interrogated by JEUNE AFRIQUE before March, Mr M'Zali was the wisest choice among the possibilities, but not necessarily the first.

In consequence of his functions as delegate minister to the prime minister, Mr Mohamed Sayeh, director of the Destourien Socialist Party came first, at least on the technical side (JEUNE AFRIQUE No 1000). In fact, encouraged by him, the members of the government tended to turn to him during the transition week following Hedi Nouira's accident.

The second person most often mentioned is Mr Habib Bourguiba Jr. His recent missions to Presidents Giscard d'Estaing and Carter put him in the first rank of succession. Because of the reputation of the first nominee as a repressive man and of the second as spoilt kid of the regime, the designation of Mr Mohamed M'Zali was received with a tinge of relief in all quarters--once the first surprise had passed.

Well, then, successor or not successor? Nobody can say yet. The coordinator, however, has some assets. Young (he is 55), Mr Mohamed M'Zali, says one of his collaborators, "Would more easily triumph in an electoral campaign on the American model than in a war of succession."

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More a fighter than a tactician, ambitious, obstinate, hardworking, this Bachelor of Philosophy (from the Sorbonne) and destourien from the word go has been minister six times: national defense (1968-69), youth and sports (1970-71), public health (1973-76), national education (1969-70, 1971-73 and since 1976). Authoritarian, enthusiastic but methodical, he inspired this remark of one of his colleagues: M'Zali starts as a corporal and finishes everywhere as commander or top of the class." (JEUNE AFRIQUE No. 960)

A sportsman, he jogs his 1000 m three times a week, he is vice-president of the International Olympic Committee. And--this explains a lot--he is loyal to his friends. Did he not lose his post at National Education in 1970 because he had dedicated one of his books to Ben Salah, when the latter was expecting to be arrested?

A Political Vacuum Hard to Fill

Having good relations with all his colleagues in the government, he succeeded in maintaining contact with diverse political currents. And, it is to be recalled, he is the only one who did not personally lead the bureau of the "legitimate" UGTT (General Union of Tunisian Workers) of Tijani Abid. Close to the Arab-Muslim option, he is nonetheless modernist. "Mohamed M'Zali is somebody who makes politics by not making any," declared a member of the opposition.

An opposition which from the Communist Party to the Democratic Socialist Movement by way of the Popular Unity Movement (MUP of Ben Salah) is unanimous: "Personalities are of no consequence." "In this new choice of a president, says Mohamed Harmel, secretary general of the Communist Party (banned), there is no indication of a renewal. Post-Gafsa requires a change which must be expressed." "President Bourguiba remains the first accountable for change or no change," adds Mr Brahim Hayder, member of the MUP. A Social-Democrat received by Bourguiba goes further: "Ten years, that is plenty. Bourguiba knew it long ago but, considering his age, he did not dare to envision a government without Mr Nour. Nour's illness liberates him at the same time from the pressure imposed by Gafsa and Mr Nour himself."

"Tunisia is going through a tricky time," the former prime minister, Bahi Laghdam, tells us. "Is M'Zali to be the scapegoat or will he pass the test of prime minister with honors? Algerian restlessness, Libya's aggression, the trial of the commandos where heads will roll, and the social unrest make a prognosis difficult."

As a man of compromise, Mohamed M'Zali could be a factor of detente, internal as well as external. By ordering the reopening of the closed law and economic sciences faculty and of the engineering school, Bourguiba seems to be orienting the government in that direction.

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For the intelligentsia, Nourira was not a refuge but a hope. "The second congress," declared a law professor, "proved that Nourira had little initiative but that he was willing to change. Today, who knows?"

In business circles, the absence of a certain stability is lamented: "With Mr Nourira somebody who started an enterprise knew he could carry on without harassment. What will tomorrow bring?" asks a building contractor.

Several high officials, company directors, former ministers and even incumbent ministers are worried about the political vacuum. "Because of his age and his experience within and outside the party, Mr Nourira had an uncontested authority over most of his ministers. Today, whatever the successor's personality he will be considered as an equal, as far as we are concerned. It will be all the harder for him to acquire authority, as Bourguiba will regard him as a kid and not as an assistant. How is M'Zali going to put himself across and convince Bourguiba? Because, if Bourguiba remains a political animal, he is far removed from the hard facts of the country."

However, according to a waiter born in Bizerta, to be a candidate for succession, "It is enough to be born in Monastir like Mr M'Zali, Mr Nourira and President Bourguiba."

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